United Nations A/69/403

General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 September 2014

Original: English

Sixty-ninth session
Agenda item 112 (c)
Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fifteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 16 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the pleasure to recall that the Government of the State of Qatar has presented its candidature for re-election as a member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2015-2017, at the elections to be held during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly in 2014.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006, please find attached a statement of the voluntary pledges and commitments of the State of Qatar to the promotion and protection of human rights at the national and international levels (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could arrange for the present letter and its annex to be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 112 (c) of the agenda.

(*Signed*) Alya Ahmed Saif **Al-Thani**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

14-61590 (E) 021014

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 16 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

[Original: Arabic]

Candidacy of the State of Qatar to the Human Rights Council

Introduction

1. The promotion and protection of human rights is one of the pillars of the policy of the State of Qatar. It is a strategic choice underpinning the Government's comprehensive reform process. That approach was highlighted in the Qatar National Vision 2030, an overarching vision for development that addresses key human rights dimensions in such areas as education, health, the environment, labour rights, the empowerment of women, children's rights and its national development strategy. The Government of the State of Qatar considers the promotion and protection of human rights to be the cornerstone of its foreign policy.

2. Based on that perspective and policy, the State of Qatar has sought to become a member of the Human Rights Council since the latter was established. Qatar believes in the important role of the Council as the primary organ of the United Nations for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Efforts and achievements of the State of Qatar during its previous term as a member of the Human Rights Council

3. Throughout its membership of the Human Rights Council in the period 2007-2010, the State of Qatar cooperated actively with Member States in order to fulfil the Council's mandate in the best possible way and achieve the noble aims for which it was established.

4. The Government of the State of Qatar is convinced of the need to continue working through this important international forum. It has therefore decided to submit its candidacy for membership in the Council for the period 2015-2017. Having fulfilled its national and international obligations and continued to work towards meeting the commitments that it made upon election to the Council in 2007, the State of Qatar was further encouraged in its bid for re-election. In this regard, the most significant steps taken by the Government during the past period are as follows:

At the national level

- Amending the Penal Code to include an explicit definition of torture identical to the one set forth in Article I of the Convention against Torture;
- Enacting Law No. 15 of 2011 on combating human trafficking, which marks an important step in the country's efforts to combat human trafficking and protect the victims of trafficking-related crimes;
- Ratifying the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This measure demonstrates political will to promote the values of tolerance and freedom of thought and expression. It underscores the

importance of culture in achieving social integration and fostering equality and non-discrimination;

- Establishing the National Committee for International Humanitarian Law to advise the Government and help it implement and disseminate international humanitarian law;
- Establishing the National Committee for Occupational Health and Safety by virtue of Cabinet decision No. 16 of 2011, which was a result of the efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in cooperation with experts from the International Labour Organization;
- Establishing the National Committee on Climate Change and Clean Development to follow up implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol;
- Establishing the Qatar Committee for the Alliance of Civilizations, by virtue of Cabinet decision No. 8 of 2010, in order to combat intolerance and underscore the role of civilizations in promoting dialogue, resolving conflicts, consolidating the values of tolerance, solidarity and peace among the world's peoples, and furthering human development;
- Establishing the Qatar Foundation for Social Protection and Rehabilitation, a privately-owned public welfare institution that aims to protect children and women from domestic and social violence, provide rehabilitation for individuals with social problems and combat trafficking;
- Enacting Law No. 6 of 2013 on the Health and Education Fund, which provides sustainable financial resources to support health and education services and the institutions that provide them, in accordance with the State's higher interests, in addition to providing financial support for emergency situations;
- Enacting Law No. 7 of 2013 on social health insurance, which establishes a mandatory health insurance scheme to ensure the provision of basic health services to all Qatari nationals, citizens of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, residents and visitors;
- Establishing the Qatar Foundation for Social Action on 14 July 2013. The Foundation is a high-level institution with a single board of directors that oversees and monitors entities involved in the area of social affairs. It formulates and develops plans, programmes, policies and strategies aimed at furthering the objectives of civil society institutions and following up their implementation, in cooperation and coordination with Government ministries and agencies and with public and private entities at home and abroad;
- Establishing the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority, by virtue of Emiri Decree No. 75 of 2011, to provide oversight, ensure transparency and integrity and combat corruption in all its forms and manifestations;
- Establishing the Standing Committee on Emergencies which was reconfigured and made broader and more inclusive by virtue of Cabinet decision No. 14 of 2011. The Committee prepares studies and develops plans and procedures to tackle disasters, provide prompt disaster relief, ensure safe transportation and

communications, and develop and disseminate outreach plans through the media;

- Hosting international conferences and forums on development, democracy, human rights, and fostering a culture of peace. The Government has convened the Doha Forum, the Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, and the US-Islamic World Forum on an annual basis. It also hosted the Fourth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in 2011, in addition to many global trade conferences and the Doha Implementation Meeting for the Istanbul Process, entitled "Doha Meeting for Advancing Religious Freedom through Interfaith Collaboration". It will host the thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2015;
- Hosting the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants in November 2013, and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers in January 2014;
- Hosting a delegation from the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights in March 2014;
- Hosting several non-governmental human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, which visited the country in 2012 and 2014, Amnesty International, which visited in 2013 and 2014, and the International Trade Union Federation, which visited in 2014.

At the international level

- Endeavouring to participate actively in international efforts to promote and protect human rights, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Constitution of Qatar;
- Acceding to most of the core international human rights instruments;
- Working to support the Human Rights Council and cooperate with other international and regional mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Cooperating diligently with the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review Working Group throughout the review process of the second national report of the State of Qatar on 7 May 2014. The Government attaches great importance to the role of the Working Group in helping countries to enhance and strengthen the fulfilment of their obligations under international human rights law;
- Cooperating with human rights treaty bodies and assiduously fulfilling the relevant obligations;
- Continuing to strengthen its relationship with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by convening regular bilateral consultations since May 2010;
- Continuing to support the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha;
- Pursuing multilateral cooperation under the aegis of various international human rights mechanisms;

- Participating actively in meetings and other arrangements to address specific threats to human rights. For instance, Qatar has actively tackled human trafficking through its membership in the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking. It works to promote closer ties between cultures and peoples by participating actively in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations;
- Formulating international humanitarian and development initiatives, including the following:
    - The HOPEFOR initiative, which aims to improve the effectiveness and coordination of military and civil defence resources in order to respond to natural disasters;
    - The Protecting Education in Insecurity and Armed Conflict initiative, which aims to protect, support and promote the right to education in current or potential zones of crisis, conflict and war;
    - The Al-Fakhoora initiative, which aims to support and protect students and schools in conflict zones around the world, especially in Gaza;
    - The Silatech initiative, a social initiative that seeks to expand business and employment opportunities for young people throughout the Arab world. Its programmes currently span 15 Arab countries. Since its creation, the Foundation has funded and supported more than 86,000 youth-run projects;
    - The Reach Out To Asia (ROTA) initiative, a charity that operates under the auspices of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Its mission is to support communities in overcoming obstacles and creating links with a view to achieving education for all, with a focus on extending assistance to Asia;
    - Establishing the Qatar Development Fund, which aims to help Arab and other developing countries to develop their economies and implement relevant programmes;
    - Launching the Global Dry Land Alliance initiative and the Education Above All initiative in 2010 and 2011. The Government believes in the need to address humanitarian and development challenges and to work to provide sustainable solutions;
    - Launching the Educate a Child initiative, a global initiative aimed at reducing the number of children around the world who are deprived of their right to education as a result of conflicts, wars and natural disasters, as well as children living in urban slums and remote rural areas, including groups that may face special challenges in obtaining an education, such as girls, persons with disabilities and minorities;
    - Establishing the Qatari-Mauritanian Institution for Social Development in Mauritania, whose activities encompass literacy programmes, especially for children, including their education and rehabilitation and the establishment of small-scale institutions to assist them.

Human rights: a cornerstone of Qatar's policy and approach

5. The State of Qatar is addressing the issue of human rights in an integrated manner that takes into account the importance of fundamental freedoms and democracy, places human beings at the centre of State policy, respects freedom of expression and judicial independence, and promotes a culture of peace and acceptance of others. Recognizing that human development and the protection and promotion of human rights are interdependent, the State of Qatar has pursued comprehensive human development. As a result, the country has experienced an exemplary development renaissance that has made it the top-ranked country in the Middle East and North Africa region and the eighteenth-ranked country in the world, according to the 2013 World Economic Forum Report on Human Capital.

6. In the light of its commitment to a policy based on the interdependence of development and human rights, the Government of Qatar has extended assistance to developing countries around the world. In 2011-2012, Government and private sources provided humanitarian and development aid totalling 3,001,764,000 Qatari riyals. That aid helped 100 countries worldwide, particularly least developed countries, in their endeavour to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

7. In accordance with its commitment to international law and norms, the Government has supported the rights of peoples in their quest for fundamental freedoms and the rights to dignity, social justice, self-determination and all other human rights.

8. At the national level, driven by political will and a climate conducive to promoting and protecting human rights, the Government has focused on the institutional consolidation of human rights. To that end the Government has taken the following actions:

- Working to make the State of Qatar a State governed by the rule of law and institutions, one that safeguards the rights of all who live on its territory, protects their dignity and fulfils the hopes and aspirations of the people of Qatar to achieve development, progress and prosperity;
- Responding quickly and effectively to all human rights-related issues and concerns;
- Incorporating the provisions of international and regional instruments into the domestic legal system, and formulating laws and regulations consistent with international human rights standards;
- Conducting a comprehensive review of labour laws, procedures and policies to promote and protect the rights of national and resident workers in accordance with international standards, with a view to strengthening the national human rights regime;
- Formulating public policies consistent with international human rights standards, and making the promotion of human rights an integral part of the Qatar National Vision 2030;
- Establishing committees to promote and protect human rights, such as the National Human Rights Committee, the Doha Centre for Media Freedom, the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, and the Silatech initiative;

- Creating human rights offices, departments and units within State entities, and empowering those offices to fulfil their functions;
- Continuing to campaign promote and raise awareness of human rights principles at the national level;
- Considering mechanisms to govern the working conditions of domestic workers and reviewing the law on the entry, exit, residence and sponsorship (Kafala) of migrants and the labour law with a view to their development;
- In the context of its ongoing efforts to ensure transparency and independence, commissioning an independent international firm to review all laws and procedures regarding migrant labour, compare them to best practices and make recommendations to reinforce Government efforts to improve migrant workers' employment and living conditions. The firm's report was circulated among the relevant Government bodies in order for them to review its recommendations and formulate an integrated work programme, which will soon be announced.

Voluntary pledges and commitments made by the State of Qatar

9. As the State of Qatar hopes to become a member of the Human Rights Council in the period 2015-2017, it pledges to continue making an active contribution to the work of the Council, to support all activities to promote human rights around the world and to mainstream them into all areas. In this context, the State of Qatar undertakes to do the following:

At the national level

- To adhere to the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights;
- To continue improving the output and effectiveness of national human rights institutions by drawing on international best practices and sharing experiences;
- To strengthen coordination between national institutions and recently established departments within the State's human rights bodies;
- To continue working to identify the challenges and difficulties hindering the promotion and protection of human rights in Qatar, and developing national legislation, regulations and administrative procedures in response to the positive recommendations made in that regard;
- To support public policies that promote the human rights of social groups, women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and migrant workers;
- To continue integrating human rights into curricula;
- To implement the human rights components of the Qatar National Vision 2030;
- To continue pursuing coordination, cooperation and extensive partnership with all social groups and stakeholders in order to establish a culture of respect for and promotion of human rights and address all challenges and difficulties.

At the regional level

- To create incentives to address human rights issues as priority topics in regional forums, mainstream them into regional forums, programmes, activities and priorities;
- To support bilateral and multilateral programmes that contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights among the countries of the region;
- To continue playing a constructive, impartial and honest role, notably through mediation, in resolving regional crises from the legal and humanitarian standpoint, in order to protect and address threats to human rights.

At the international level

- To continue providing various forms of support for the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha;
- To continue cooperating fully with international organizations and United Nations human rights entities, particularly the Human Rights Council, its bodies and its special procedures and mechanisms;
- To focus on continued support for the work of international organizations and the United Nations human rights entities;
- To implement the recommendations accepted by the Government during the Universal Periodic Review;
- To maintain the standing invitation extended on 1 July 2010 to the special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council;
- To consider acceding to the international human rights instruments to which it is not yet a party.